

“See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.” Ephesians 5:15-16

Corruption

The problems that we are up against became even clearer during a recent mission throughout the country. Everywhere we were confronted with evidence that the 15 years of misrule by the African National Congress, (ANC), has been an abject failure. From one side of the country to the other, citizens were complaining of municipalities that collect exorbitant rates and taxes but deliver no services. Every community had multiple examples of corruption scandals by municipal officials, town councillors, provincial government and national government.

Crime

Every year I see communities which used to be immaculate and orderly degenerating into graffiti vandalised, litter strewn, polluted targets of crime and grime. The deforestation over huge parts of the country is absolutely heart rendering and outrageous. Even in small towns, burglar bars, high security fences, security gates and alarms predominate. Even churches need to be encased in burglar bars and security gates.

Collapse

The disastrous consequences of affirmative action, an attitude of entitlement, and other unworkable socialist policies are all too evident. Outcome Based Education Curriculum 2005 has proven to be a catastrophe. Even the ministry of education admits that over 85% of the government schools are dysfunctional. The state promotion of evolutionism, situation ethics, alternative lifestyles, and the re-writing of history has eroded the essential foundations for

discipline, productivity and freedom. The consequences of abandoning the Bible and embracing secular humanism are evident throughout this troubled land.

“Failing our Children”

Not only were we confronted with corruption in society, but also in the church. At a Ministers Fraternal numerous pastors expressed their frustration at the state schools and at the state of their own churches. *“The schools are failing our children.”; “Our children can’t even think.”; “Even when the teachers aren’t striking, our children aren’t getting much of an education.”; “Many of our children cannot even read and write, despite years in school.”*

“We are Raising Pagans”

Another pastor confessed: *“Our parents are failing to disciple their children. Even we pastors are failing to disciple our children. We are raising pagans.”* Several pastors admitted that not even they had any time for their own children. The television was the electronic baby sitter. They were too tired to interact with their own children. They realised what they were getting at school was not good for them, but they sent them there anyway. They realised that T.V. is a negative influence, but they just found it more convenient to have their children sit in front of the T.V. so that they could get some rest!

Bringing the World into the Church

One pastor reported on their attempt to attract youth to their Friday night youth group by launching a Christian night club: “Soon we were told that we had to drop the Christian music and have more racy secular music. We allowed the youth to go outside of the church buildings to smoke cigarettes and drink alcohol. Soon we had hundreds of young people at our Christian night club. But we soon realised that there was nothing Christian about it. Our youth got into serious sin. After one of our youth camps, we found lots of empty bottles of alcohol, packets of cigarettes and many condoms.” The pastor admitted that he had to finally close down the youth group and Christian night club. He had to admit to the church leaders that he was wrong and that they should have never allowed the youth group to become so secular and sinful.

We will Not Lie, Steal or Cheat

At a Bible college we saw many of the ministerial students cheating during P.T. and then lying when caught. The Scripture says that not many of us should be teachers, because we teachers will be judged with greater strictness (James 3:1). To whom much is given, much shall be required. Yet, there was much confusion over the difference between a college and a church. When one student was found stealing, other students suggested that he must just be forgiven and given another chance. It was pointed out to him that the Code of Conduct for the students made clear that the consequences for stealing, lying, or cheating, was immediate dismissal. The individual concerned had in fact been warned before. Those in authority do not have the right to overlook transgressions of the law. They must apply a ministry of justice. The church is a ministry of grace. However, a Bible college training candidates for the ministry must maintain the highest standards of integrity. On numerous occasions I have seen evidence in theological seminaries of very low ethical standards and turning a blind eye to serious character flaws that should disqualify anyone from the ministry. There is no doubt that we need a Revival of the Fear of the Lord in our churches and colleges.

Popcorn Praise

While we had the privilege of ministering in some of the finest churches, colleges and schools, with some of the highest standards, we also saw other ministries with disturbing practices. Some Christian bookshops seem to have their shelves filled with questionable material, unbiblical doctrines and lightweight popcorn theology. In some churches the “praise and worship” seemed to be more a matter of some badly dressed musicians giving a performance - while most of the congregation stood around wanting to participate, but finding it hard to follow the songs. Instead of Hymns and Scripture choruses, which are easy to participate in, numerous churches now seem to be presenting renditions of the latest popular release, even though they generally do not lend themselves to congregational singing.

Dishonouring the Lord

Also disturbing is how so many churches act like an audience - giving applause for musical items which one would have thought in the context were offerings as unto the Lord. Even testimonies and sermons were sometimes responded to with applause! Most disturbing of all was the practice of some leaders every now and then saying: *“Let’s give the Lord a clap offering!”*
The halfhearted almost

- applause from some of the congregation seemed to me to be blasphemously lukewarm. Surely, if one was really to give the Lord “a clap offering”, it would be a standing ovation with great intensity, similar to that heard at the end of a recital of Handel’s *Messiah* at the City Hall. The halfhearted, lukewarm, sloppy, sentimental slush so often dished up and called “Praise and Worship”, “A Sacrifice of Praise” and “Worship” is a disgrace.

Entertainment

It is hard to avoid the conclusion that much of what is going on in the name of Praise and Worship in our average churches has nothing whatsoever to do with worshipping the Lord “*in Spirit and in Truth*” . Entertainment seems to predominate where only genuine worship would be appropriate.

Worldliness and Deception

In many homes it is also apparent that child-centered indulgence and permissive parenting predominates. Rudeness is all too often tolerated and in many Christian homes children spend an inordinate amount of time seated in front of the television set. I do not think it would be much of an exaggeration to suggest that worldliness and deception predominates throughout most of our churches and homes. When most of the children go to secular humanist schools, and when most homes have T.V. sets blaring, we need look no further for an explanation of the disastrously weak condition of much of what passes for Christianity these days.

Diagnosing the Darkness

Darkness and deception. Hearts corrupted and heads darkened is seen in the worldliness of conduct and a deception in thinking. In the light of this spiritual diagnosis it is evident that the urgent need for Repentance and Reformation. We need to get back to the Bible for Biblical Reformation and Spiritual Revival.

Biblical Boldness and Balance

That is why Livingstone Fellowship is committed to fulfilling the Cultural Mandate and the Great Commission of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are Reformed, Evangelical and Evangelistic. We seek to maintain a balance of head and heart, doctrine and devotion, having the truth on fire. Missions, education, concern for the persecuted church, working for Reformation and praying for spiritual Revival are the primary focus of our fellowship.

Vocation

One of the vital solutions to the corruption, entitlement and exploitation all too prevalent today can be found in the Reformation doctrine of vocation. Vocation is the Theology of the Christian life. It provides the blueprint for how Christians are to live in the world and to influence our culture. Vocation provides a vital key to effective parenting, strong, healthy marriages and a vibrant economy.

“But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk, and so I ordain in all the churches.” 1 Corinthians 7:17

Interdependence

Dr. Martin Luther taught that God created us to be dependent others. We depend on farmers, parents, teachers and so many others. And just as God is working through the vocation of others to bless you, He is also working through you to bless others. Your vocation is far more than the work that you do. Every Christian has multiple vocations. Luther described these as four estates, or spheres of life, that God has established: the family/or household; the church, the state and the common order of Christian love.

“Give us This Day our Daily Bread”

God distributes His gifts by means of ordinary people exercising their talents, which themselves are gifts of God. God gives us our daily bread through the vocations of the farmer, the miller and

the baker. God looms behind everyone who provides us with the goods and services that we need.

Blessing our Neighbours

God heals us by means of doctors, nurses and other medical professionals. He makes our lives easier by means of inventors, scientists and engineers. God inspires beauty by means of artists, authors and musicians. He provides us clothing, shelter and other things we need by means of factory workers, construction contractors, bricklayers, plumbers and electricians.

Family Relationships

Your family relationships are also your calling. God established marriage. Being a husband, or a wife, is a vocation. Being a parent, a father or a mother, is a vocation. So too is being a son or daughter. You are a brother, or sister, a nephew, or uncle, a grandmother, or grandfather. Each person holds multiple vocations, even within one family. A woman may be the wife of a husband, the mother of her children, the daughter of her mother and the sister of her brother.

Cultural Mandate

We also have vocations in our community. Each one of us were born into a particular time and place in society. The cultural context, community and nation in which we find ourselves is also part of the vocation God has assigned to us.

Roman Catholic Spirituality

In stressing the spiritual significance of all areas of life, Dr. Martin Luther challenged the entire Roman Catholic practice of reserving the terms of vocation and calling for religious orders. If you, as a Catholic, were really serious about God, you were expected to become a priest, a monk or a nun. To enter into these spiritual offices you were required to make a vow of celibacy

– thereby rejecting marriage and parenthood. You were also expected to take a vow of poverty – thereby rejecting full participation in the economic life of the workplace. Your vow of obedience would substitute the authority of the Roman Catholic system instead of that of God's Law in society.

Protestant Spirituality

However, the Reformers insisted that the Christian life requires, not withdrawal from the world, but engagement in the world. We are called to live out our Christian Faith, not only in “church work”, but in our work ethic. In practice this meant that the Reformers moved spiritual disciplines out of the monastery into everyday life. The ideal of celibacy was replaced with faithfulness in marriage. The monastic goal of poverty was replaced with the Biblical work ethic, principles of hard work, ingenuity and thrift. Obedience to the religious order was replaced with obedience to God's Law. Even more importantly, prayer, worship and service was moved into the family and the workplace.

Forgotten and Forsaken

Unfortunately, many so called Protestants today have forgotten this vital Reformation doctrine of vocation. Today numerous ostensibly Protestant Christians have slipped into the assumption that serving God is only a matter of “church work”. Some Christians have become so preoccupied with “the Lord's work” that they have allowed their marriages to fall apart and they have failed to invest quality time in discipling their children.

Loving God and our Neighbour

The church is the place where Christians are to meet each week, to feed on God's Word, seek the mercy and forgiveness of Christ and to grow in Faith. Then we are to go into our vocations, to our families, work places and communities to apply the Lordship of Christ in all areas of life and to bear much fruit. The true purpose of every vocation should be to love God and love our neighbour. Jesus taught that whatever you did unto one of the least of these My brethren, you did it unto Me. Feeding the hungry, welcoming the stranger, visiting the sick and those imprisoned for their faith is one of the ways that we show our love for Christ.

Serving our Neighbour

Every vocation has its neighbours for us to serve. In a church fellowship, or congregation, we are called to love and serve one another. In marriage, husbands are to love and serve their wives “As Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her” (Ephesians 5:25). Wives are to submit to their husbands as the church submits to Christ. Both the wife and the husband are called to sacrifice themselves for each other.

A Priestly Sacrifice

Vocation has to do with the priesthood of all believers. A priest performs a sacrifice. We no longer need sacrifices for our sins. Jesus Christ, our great High Priest, is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. He has offered Himself up as our sacrifice - once for all. However, in the light of Christ’s sacrifice, we are called to *“present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.”*
Romans 12:1

A Living Sacrifice

Members of any congregation are called to love and serve one another. In marriage, husbands are to love and serve their wives and wives are to love and serve their husbands. Parents love and serve their children. Children are to love and serve their parents. Rulers are to love and serve their subjects. Workers are to love and serve their employer and their customers. Loving and serving involves an act of self-denial or the sake of somebody else. Vocation focuses on self sacrifice. We are to love and serve God’s Creation by means of our vocation.

Godly Authority

Certain vocations exercise authority, but authority must not be abused. Jesus taught that the rulers of the Gentiles laud it over them and called themselves benefactors. *“But it shall not be*

so amongst you. Whoever would be great among you must be your servant ...”
(Mark 10:42-45).

Sins Against Vocation

However, instead of serving others we all too often demand to be served. Instead of loving our neighbour, we all too often use our neighbour for our own selfish reason. Mothers are called to love and serve their children, not to abort them. Doctors are called to heal their patients, not to kill them. Leaders are called to love and serve their people, not to exploit, extort or tyrannise them.

Ignoring our Duties

Unfortunately, there is a tremendous tendency to seek out the extraordinary spectacles at the expense of performing our daily duties. We look for miracles, mountain top experiences and spectacular events. Meanwhile the spiritual significance of every day life can easily be overlooked.

Our Daily Altar

When we understand the Protestant work ethic and the doctrine of vocation then we see that the kitchen table, the office desk, the computer screen, the shop counter, the printer and the garden can be altars on which we exercise our royal priesthood, offering up a living sacrifice to our God.

School of Discipleship

Martin Luther taught that marriage is the best school of discipleship. He taught that dairymaids can milk cows to the Glory of God. Our vocation is where our sanctification happens, and where effective evangelism can take place. When we have a strong sense of our vocation as a calling

and responsibility before God then it will change the quality of everything we do.

What our Nation Needs

This is what our country needs: a Protestant work ethic and Christians determined to fulfill their vocation wholeheartedly - as a means of worshipping God, loving our neighbour, caring for God's Creation and protecting all God's creatures. Then we will not be using people and loving things, but we will be using things in order to express our love for others. Instead of being self centred we will be Christ centered. We will realise that nothing less than our very best is good enough for our Creator God.

A Personal Challenge

Is your conscience captive to the Word of God?

Are you part of the problem or part of the solution?

What are you doing to resist the New Age/New World Order?

What are you doing to fulfill the Great Commission?

What are you doing to make a positive difference?

What are you doing to change your world?

The audio CD of this message by Dr. Peter Hammond is available from:

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